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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DURBAN 000061

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SUBJECT: DURBAN POLITICAL UPDATE - ISSUE 1

REF: DURBAN 54

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CLASSIFIED BY: Eugene S. Young, Consul General.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) IN THIS ISSUE:

- Situation Remains Tense in Ezingoleni Municipality
- President Mbeki Visits Inkatha Freedom Party Stronghold
- KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health's Head of Department Suspended

12. (U) RECENT CABLE TRAFFIC:

- DURBAN 54: ANC Secures Simply Majority in KwaZulu-Natal
- DURBAN 59: Buthelezi Preaches More of the Same at IFP Annual Conference

SITUATION REMAINS TENSE IN EZINQOLENI MUNICIPALITY

13. (C) Tensions remain high in Ezingoleni municipality following the recent floor crossing period in September (see REFTEL). During the floor crossing period, Ezingoleni Mayor Amos Mpisi crossed from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) to the African National Congress (ANC), allowing the ANC to assume control of the municipality. The situation in the municipality then deteriorated, following claims by the IFP that five of their members went missing. Amongst the five were two municipal councilors, two municipal workers, and the Ugu district IFP Youth Brigade Leader. The IFP maintains that their members were abducted by plain clothes police. The five were missing for three days, then reappeared at the Westville police station. The ANC accused the five IFP members of plotting to kill Mayor Mpisi, in revenge of his betrayal of the IFP. On October 1, a regional court charged the five IFP members with intimidation and conspiring to murder Mpisi. The charges were dropped on October 11 due to a lack of evidence. Senior Public Prosecutor Previnash Naidoo said the Director of Public Prosecutions may recharge the men following the completion of an ongoing police investigation.

14. (C) Concerning the incident, IFP President Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi accused the ANC on October 13 of reverting to "old apartheid-era style" tactics where the "resources of the State are being mobilized against Opposition parties for political ends." He elaborated, stating that they were taken away to "places they did not know" and "assaulted by white and Indian men in balaclavas."

15. (U) Prior to floor crossing, on August 20, two IFP members were convicted of the 2006 murder of ANC Councilor Zakhele Cele,

also in Ezingoleni. The District High Court found that IFP Councilor Mkhishwa Khawula and his cousin, Fanobani Ndovela, were guilty of the ANC councilor's murder, as well as the murder of his three bodyguards. Cele had won a hotly contested election in Ezingoleni in June 2006, but was murdered three days after his victory. Cele's seat was filled, following an election, by another ANC member.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The IFP's allegations of politically-motivated abductions are worrisome in light of the history of political violence in Ezingoleni. Cele's murder raised fears in 2006 that more wide-scale political violence could return to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Given the still intense rivalry between the ANC and IFP in KZN, this kind of political violence and intimidation is always possible. Post will monitor the situation and report any widening of politically-based conflict. END COMMENT.

#### PRESIDENT MBEKI VISITS INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY STRONGHOLD

¶7. (C) President Mbeki visited KZN on October 6-7 for a presidential "imbizo," or gathering. The gathering was held in Ladysmith and Estcourt in the uThukela district, a long-time stronghold of the IFP. While IFP members rallied during Mbeki's visit, the visit was peaceful. If anything, IFP supporters were reportedly ambivalent about the visit. The visit marked Mbeki's first "imbizo" in the province since allegations were made in early 2007 that Jacob Zuma supporters were trying to make KZN a no-go zone for Mbeki. However, no pro-Jacob Zuma ANC supporters showed up during the visit. KZN political analyst Protas Madlala commented on October 13 that uThukela was selected by Mbeki's team as it was a "soft target because disruption by pro-Zuma supporters seemed unlikely." Madlala predicted, however, that Mbeki would not get much support there, as "Zuma has support there, even from IFP supporters. I think the moment you put Zuma into an ANC box you start to misunderstand the issue. It has become a human issue now, not an ANC succession issue, or an ANC/IFP issue."

¶8. (C) Mbeki was asked by a local resident whether he would change South Africa's constitution in order to allow him a third term as the country's President. Mbeki replied that "you should

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not sit in this chair too long. You should not turn into a hereditary chair which can be passed on to your son. The way I see it, is we should not change this constitution of ours...I'm not a traditional leader...I don't want to stay for longer than I should." Mbeki reportedly then tried to convince traditional leaders present at the gathering that his comments were intended as a joke. While he may have been joking, support for traditional leaders remains strong in rural KZN, and his comment was likely taken as an affront by those present.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Madlala's comments are valid in KZN, given that there is a prevailing opinion that Zuma is a "victim" of a conspiracy against him. Zuma's support remains strong amongst rural Zulus, most of whom believe in an anti-Zuma conspiracy. This view, particularly among ANC members, has served to keep support for Zuma at a high level, with many supporters noting that if the National Prosecuting Authority recharges Zuma their support would increase, not decrease. END COMMENT.

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH'S HEAD OF DEPARTMENT SUSPENDED

¶10. (C) The Head of Department (HOD) at the KZN Department of Health, Dr. Busi Nyembezi, was suspended by the KZN provincial government on October 17. HOD Nyembezi was suspended following an investigation, commissioned by Premier (Governor) of KZN Sibusiso Ndebele, which found that she used her position to award Department contracts to her own private company. HOD Nyembezi lashed out at Member of Executive Council (MEC) Peggy Nkonyeni, stating that she was a scapegoat for MEC Nkonyeni's "incompetence." HOD Nyembezi said her relationship with MEC Nkonyeni broke down when she was unable to follow MEC Nkonyeni's guidance. HOD Nyembezi further stated that, on a scale of 1 to 10, she would give MEC Nkonyeni a "one, and I'm being generous."

(NOTE: The MEC is the equivalent of a provincial minister and is the political head of a department, whereas the HOD is the administrative head. END NOTE)

11. (C) COMMENT: The dispute between the MEC and HOD will likely have a negative impact on the KZN Department of Health as it is already overwhelmed, like the rest of South Africa, by staffing shortages as well as HIV/AIDS. The conflict may also affect the USG's ability to efficiently work with the Department on HIV/AIDS projects under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Dr. Nyembezi had been seen by many in KZN as more effective than her difficult predecessor, Ronald Green-Thompson, who was promoted to a senior advisor position in the national Department of Health. END COMMENT.  
YOUNG